

# The Central View

Serving the Citizens of Fairfield, Lexington, Newberry & Richland Counties



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## Rail Study Adopted by CMCOG Board



Commuter Rail Transit is becoming more viable in our Region

CMCOG, in partnership with URS Corporation, recently completed a planning study to reassess the feasibility of commuter rail and other high-capacity transit modes in the Central Midlands region. The latest study was commissioned to take a more detailed look at three corridors – Newberry, Camden & Batesburg-Leesville to Columbia - that had been identified in a previous 2000 study and to develop an Action Plan and strategies to prepare the region for future implementation.

Although the 2000 study indicated that commuter rail should not be considered feasible in the short term, a reconsideration of this summation was deemed timely, given increased traffic congestion, the success of pilot initiatives such as the SmartRide commuter bus service from Newberry and Kershaw counties as well as the rapid population growth since the 2000 Census.

A peer city analysis as well as a technical evaluation of each potential corridor was performed, with particular consideration given to potential ridership; the catchment areas and demographics of potential station sites; the ease of implementing commuter rail along each corridor; public opinion and implementation costs.

Of the three corridors evaluated, the Camden to Columbia exhibited the greatest potential to support commuter rail having the highest estimated ridership of around 2,000 daily boardings, the lowest estimated implementation costs (\$80 million) as well as the lowest rail freight traffic and fewer rail crossings than either the Newberry or Batesburg-Leesville corridors.

However, the completed rail study indicates that each of the three analyzed corridors has characteristics to potentially support high capacity transit in the future, but also stresses that interim transit service in the identified corridors should be developed to increase the attractiveness of transit to passengers. The importance of supporting existing regional transit operations to provide commuters with a means of transportation to their place of employment upon their arrival in Columbia was also emphasized.

Other recommendations of the study include the identification and preservation of potential station sites, the development of transit-friendly land use policies and continued dialogue with freight line operators. However, the adoption of the new rail study is the first step towards bringing high capacity transit to the Central Midlands region.

## Ombudsman Staff Develop New Documents

For more than ten years, the Central Midlands Long-Term Care Regional Ombudsman Program has been responsible for advocating, mediating and investigating reports and concerns on behalf of vulnerable adults in long-term care facilities. Midlands ombudsman staff regularly handle around 1,550 cases annually; one of the largest caseloads in the State of South Carolina. In addition to investigations into cases of abuse and neglect, through the introduction of "friendly" visits, Midlands ombudsman staff are striving to maintain a positive relationship with long-term care facilities, residents and their families.

In early 2006, in response to an overwhelming number of requests from the public for information and due to the fact that ombudsmen are not permitted to recommend facilities or release data on the number of investigations at a particular facility, Midlands ombudsman staff developed a guidebook to assist the public in often emotional process of selecting a long-term care facility.

The publication, entitled, "Choosing Long-Term Care Placement," is a comprehensive guide designed to provide information on how to select a care home, from visiting the facility through the admissions process. The guide also contains advice on how to help new residents adjust to a nursing home and includes a glossary of terms used in long-term care facilities, a variety of checklists and helpful contact information.

The guide is now being used by the Lieutenant Governor's Office on Aging as a key part of its informational packets. Staff are also developing a second document called "Empowering Residents & Families in Long-Term Care Facilities." This guide provides information on the Omnibus Adult Protection Act, the SC Bill of Rights for Residents of Long-Term Care Facilities and outlines various grievance and complaint filing procedures.





## Spotlight on: Workforce

### Announcements

Please join us in welcoming our newest Board member:

**Katherine Doucett**

Lexington County  
Administrator

And our newest Advisory Board Member:

**Charlene Herring,**  
Mayor, Town of  
Ridgeway



Julie Merrill, Aging Program Specialist for the Family Caregiver Support Program (pictured above), received a graduate level Gerontology Certificate from the University of South Carolina in May.

The Midlands Workforce Development Board (MWDB) WorkKeys Program recently completed a highly successful first year of operation, which culminated in the presentation of a Crystal Globe award for the Outstanding Local Workforce Development Program at the National ACT-WorkKeys Conference held in Nashville, Tennessee in May. The award also included \$10,000 to be used for the continued development and marketing of the WorkKeys Program in the Midlands region.

WorkKeys is a nationally standardized job skills assessment system, developed by the American College Testing (ACT) program which has been immensely popular with a wide variety of employers and educational establishments throughout the MWDB area (Richland, Lexington and Fairfield counties). The tests can be tailored to suit individual needs, while testing and assessing a variety of hard skills such as math and reading and soft skills like teamwork and observation, and identify an individual's current skill level as well as targeting ways to improve skill sets in the workplace.

Recently, the MWDB obtained a license for Worldwide Interactive Network (WIN) training, a hands-on computer model which permits an individual to move through a variety of skills tests at their own pace and a series of bronze, silver and gold "Job Ready" certification cards offer incentives to an individual to im-

prove their skills in the Midlands workplace. The MWDB has undertaken a wide-reaching advertising campaign for the WorkKeys program including a variety of television and radio spots and a number of highly visible billboard displays across the region. Furthermore, building on recent efforts to reach out to the Midlands' growing Hispanic community, the majority of WorkKeys tests and literature are also available in Spanish.

In the first twelve months of operation, MWDB staff has completed 4,972



#### The completed MWDB Bus Wrap

WorkKeys assessments serving more than 1,600 clients. A further 200 individuals have been enrolled in WIN training, earning 966 credentials. Staff has also completed 45 different job profiles for a variety of clients.

The MWDB recently used WorkKeys as an empowerment tool by providing opportunities for more than 60 at-risk youth from the Wil Lou Gray Opportu-

nity School in Springdale, South Carolina. The MWDB provided incentives for them to pass their GED, take WorkKeys and WIN training and was able to provide a variety of other employment-related skills such as health and fitness, time management, CPR training and the development of resumes, portfolios and interview techniques. The final phase of the project was to develop and install a "Bus Wrap" advertising the WorkKeys program. The completed bus was unveiled to the youth as a surprise at their graduation ceremony at Fort Jackson on June 10th, 2006.

Overall, the Midlands Workforce Development Board has enjoyed such phenomenal success with the WorkKeys program over the past year that it has fielded a number of requests to provide information on its program to other states around the country. The Midlands WorkKeys program has been hailed as "a model program for Career Readiness Certificate Programs across the country," by Dr. Teresa Chasteen, President of WIN. Dr. David Sweaney, Senior WorkKeys Consultant at the American College Testing (ACT) Program further stated that the MWDB staff has, "provided more WorkKeys services to the community in the first year than most new Value Added Resellers do in their first three years."

## CMCOG United Way Campaign in Full Swing

CMCOG has kicked off its annual United Way of the Midlands fundraising campaign.

This year's campaign runs from July 19<sup>th</sup> to August 2<sup>nd</sup> and will be packed with lots of fun games, activities and incentive prizes in an attempt to improve on last year's record contribution by staff of more than \$2,500.

The highlight of this year's campaign, which is being organized by Cyndi Gawronski, is a site

visit to a partner agency of United Way of the Midlands: Harvest Hope Food Bank on July 27<sup>th</sup> at 10:30 a.m.

As an incentive to attend and contribute to the campaign, the 27<sup>th</sup> has been declared "Sleep-in Late

Day" for any employee that contributes a minimum of \$24 for the year!

Dee Waddell of the CMCOG Ombudsman office was the first employee to sign up for the tour to the Harvest Hope Food Bank, and was presented with one of the coveted chocolate-brown UW T-shirts! Congratulations Dee! CMCOG's goal is to raise more than \$3,000 for the United Way of the Midlands in the coming year.





## City of Newberry Receives Award of Excellence

The City of Newberry, in partnership with CMCOG, received the SC Community Development Association's Award of Excellence for the Newberry Hospital Affordable Housing Project at its Spring 2006 meeting in Myrtle Beach on May 22, 2006.

The award recognizes projects completed in the last three years which have significantly improved the community and have the potential to be a catalyst for future improvements to the quality of life. Eligible projects must have involvement from different segments of the community, must address one of the community's most important needs and demonstrate specific and significant results. The projects must have involved creative use and leveraging of community resources.

The Old Hospital project was nominated for consideration by Robin Cooley of CMCOG.

The project involved the adaptive re-use of the former Newberry hospital building into 35 one-bedroom apartment units restricted to low and moderate income senior citizens. Completed in 2004 at a price tag of \$4.1 million, the project involved numerous partners and funding sources

Financing for this project included funds from CDBG, and HOME; a low interest loan made by Newberry Federal Savings Bank and guaranteed by the Federal Home Loan Bank of Atlanta; Low Income Housing Tax Credits; Historic Preservation Tax Credits; City of Newberry cash and in-kind matching funds.

Project Partners included the City of Newberry, Newberry County, First Community Bank, Federal Home Loan Bank of Atlanta, Newberry Housing Authority, Newberry County Council on

Aging, the Landmark Group, the SC Department of Commerce, the SC Department of Archives and History, the South Carolina Housing Finance and Development Authority and Central Midlands Council of Governments.

An official presentation of the Award of Excellence was made to the City of Newberry on July 11, 2006 by Carol Mason McMeekin, President of the SC Community Development Association.



The Old Newberry Hospital - Award of Excellence Winner

CMCOG would like to recognize outgoing Board Member

**Art Brooks,**  
retiring Lexington  
County Administrator

for his many years of dedication and service to the Board of Central Midlands Council of Governments

## Another Record Year for New

In 2005, a record high 9,680 building permits totaling \$1.53 billion were issued within the Central Midlands region.

70% of building permits issued in 2005 were for the construction of new single family homes with the Richland Northeast and Lexington sub-markets accounting for 43% of all single family housing permits in the region. Region-wide, the average cost of a single-



6,763 new homes were permitted in 2005

family housing permit increased from \$132,354 in 2004 to \$141,224 in 2005. The highest average cost for a new home was \$258,491 in East Columbia.

More than \$377.5 million in permits for new non-residential construction were also issued across the region in 2005.

## Region receives 3 CDBG Awards

On April 10, 2006, the Central Midlands region submitted three applications for community development funds.

The Town of Batesburg-Leesville requested \$500,000 to install drainage improvements in the Williams Street, Williams Court & Albert Street areas where flooding has been a major problem. The project will benefit 86 persons, 88% of whom are LMI.

The Town of Eastover and the City of Newberry each requested

\$20,000 to perform needs assessments. Eastover will perform a comprehensive needs assessment of the town to identify ways to improve the health of the community and become more competitive economically. The City of Newberry proposed to use its funds to perform a neighborhood analysis to develop a strategic plan for reversing neighborhood decline throughout the city.

On June 28th, 2006, Governor Sanford announced the award of more than \$11 million in grant

funds, with all CDBG applications submitted from the Central Midlands region being funded.



Batesburg-Leesville Drainage Project Site

### News In Brief

CMCOG would like to extend a warm welcome to Mr. Aaron Bell.



Mr. Bell (pictured above) has joined the CMCOG staff in the position of Transportation Planner and will primarily be responsible for Bicycle and Pedestrian-related issues.

Mr. Bell holds a Masters degree in Regional Planning from UNC Chapel Hill and comes to CMCOG from the Indian Nations COG in Tulsa, Oklahoma.



**The Official Newsletter  
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**CMCOG Member Governments:**

Fairfield County  
Lexington County  
Newberry County  
Richland County  
Town of Batesburg-Leesville  
City of Cayce  
City of Columbia  
City of Forest Acres  
Town of Irmo  
Town of Lexington  
City of Newberry  
Town of Springdale  
City of West Columbia  
Town of Winnsboro

*Articles contributed  
by CMCOG staff*

## A Word From The Chairman

Summertime is often characterized as a time for vacations and an overall slowdown of activities within the workplace. At Central Midlands COG however, summertime marks the start of the new fiscal year and heralds the arrival of a new budget and work program with which to busy ourselves.

The last program year was another very fruitful one with a number of major high-profile projects completed such as the Rail Study, Bicycle-Pedestrian Plan, the S-48 Corridor Study, and an update to the Area-wide Aging Plan to name just a few.

The upcoming program year is already showing signs of being extremely busy and productive, with a number of major plan updates on the horizon as well as some new activities.

Highlights of the upcoming year's work program at Central Midlands Council of Governments include projects such as the development of the 2008 Long Range Transportation Plan,



**CMCOG Chairman R. David  
Brown, Fairfield County**

which will ultimately help the CMCOG Board determine its long-range transportation planning goals. A second corridor study/area plan will also take place, following on from the success of the recently-completed Columbia Avenue (S-48) study.

Staff in the planning department will provide assistance to a number of local governments wishing to update their comprehensive plans; Ombudsman staff will continue to promote and expand their new Volunteer Ombudsman Program and further expansion and success

is anticipated within the Midlands Workforce Development Board from the continued promotion of the WorkKeys Program and the use of its new mobile computer lab.

As well as taking on new projects in its Work Program, CMCOG staff will continue to provide the core services for which the agency is best known – a proven record in the field of research and statistics, the provision of quality care and programs to serve the needs of our region's growing senior population as well as other key human services such as the Family Caregiver Support program, I-Care Program and the Information, Referral and Assistance Program. CMCOG will also continue its efforts to pursue funding opportunities to promote and enhance community and economic development across the region.

This year's work program is comprehensive and progressive and will enable us to continue to be good stewards of the region, ensuring that we continue to maximize our resources as we strive to enhance the quality of life in the rapidly growing Central Midlands Region.